

City of Petaluma, CA



Information for Non Profits Wishing to Sponsor A Car Wash Fundraiser

How to Sponsor a Fund Raising Car Wash that Protects Petaluma's Creeks and the Petaluma River

This handout is intended to explain water quality issues regarding the discharge of car wash water from fundraisers and to provide guidelines to be followed when hosting a car wash.

How can a car wash pollute our creeks?

During a car wash fundraiser, wash water containing detergents (even if it is biodegradable), residue from exhaust fumes, brake pads, gasoline, and motor oil washes off the cars and flows off the pavement into nearby storm drains and into our creeks and the Petaluma River. The run-off is a pollutant; it can be harmful to fish and other aquatic life that depend on clean water for their survival.



Is discharge of car wash water to the storm drain system prohibited?

Yes. Section 15.80.060 of the City of Petaluma's Storm Water Management and Discharge Control Ordinance prohibits discharging waters containing any pollutants that cause or contribute to a violation of applicable water quality standards to the city's storm water system or watercourses. (*Individual residential car washing is exempt*).

Before beginning your car wash fundraiser:

- Hold a meeting with all participants to explain the proper procedures that should be followed when conducting these activities.
- Remove all trash and debris from the car washing area.
- Use only soaps, cleaners, or detergents that are labeled: "non-toxic," "phosphate free," or "biodegradable." The safest products for the environment are vegetable-based or citrus-based soaps.
- Do not use acid based wheel cleaners or engine degreasers.
- Select sites where the wash water can soak into grass, gravel, or be diverted to nearby landscaping. This will allow the wash water to filter through the vegetation and /or soil instead of flowing directly into a storm drain.

- ❑ If you select a site that drains into a street, block off the storm drain with sandbags (coordinate with Water Resources and Conservation Department) and either divert the wash water to an area where the water can pool and evaporate throughout the day or arrange to dispose of the wash water into a sanitary sewer drain (with permission from the Water Resources and Conservation Department, 762-5892).
- ❑ Another way is to block off the storm drain (coordinate with Water Resources and Conservation Department), collect the water, and use a small sump pump to pump the water to either a vegetated area or into the sanitary sewer through a clean out opening.

During the car wash fundraiser:

- ❑ Shake car mats into a trash can or vacuum them. Do not shake dirt from car mats directly onto the ground.
- ❑ Use a bucket of soapy water to re-soap rags or sponges throughout the wash rather than adding more soap directly to rags or sponges.
- ❑ Wring rags or sponges into buckets, not onto the ground.
- ❑ Conserve water by using a good quality garden hose (that doesn't leak) with a low flow spray nozzle that has an automatic shut off.
- ❑ Always empty buckets into the sanitary sewer system (e.g. sinks or wash basins), or gravel, or onto the landscape (with permission from the property owner).

After the car wash fundraiser:

- ❑ Remember to clean up. Have a volunteer walk the perimeter of the site to pick up and properly dispose of trash and debris.
- ❑ Before you allow anything to go into the gutter or storm drain, stop and think. Storm drains do not go into the sewer; they flow directly into channels and creeks, through wetlands and to the ocean.

Who can I contact if I have questions regarding a car wash fundraiser?

The City of Petaluma Water Resources and Conservation Department has staff available to answer your questions and even tour the site with you. Staff can offer suggestions and help you determine the best way to keep wash water out of the storm drain system. Call 778-4546 if you would like assistance.
 Email: Stormwater@ci.petaluma.ca.us



This page has been prepared to inform business owners, non-profit organizations and residents in the City of Petaluma of guidelines recommended for car wash events to protect the water quality in storm drains, channels, creeks, bays and ocean.

